

American Library Association

Writing a Letter to the Editor



Writing a letter to the editor—especially to your local news outlet—is one of the most effective ways to draw the attention of your elected leaders. Congressional staff monitor media hits for their offices every day. Every time a member of congress is mentioned in the news, voters’ perceptions are influenced.

It is true that the larger the news outlet, the more the exposure to your opinion. However, smaller is often better: members of the House of Representatives care more about views expressed in their own congressional districts. Small-circulation newspapers print most of the letters they receive.

Keep in mind that every letter to the editor makes an impact, even if it’s not published. The more feedback a news outlet receives on libraries, the clearer they understand that libraries are relevant and newsworthy to their readers.

Template for a Letter to the Editor

Below is a general structure you can use to help you craft a letter to the editor. Be sure to consult the unique guidelines of your news outlet before writing your letter.

1. Introduce the issue and why you are writing the letter. If you are responding to what someone else has written, directly address that article or letter.

EXAMPLE: The White House’s budget proposal [My Town Times] recently reported on would also eliminate the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Among the cuts that could impact our community is federal funding for libraries.

2. State the facts using statistics, preferably local. If you do not have statistics, cite a local story.

EXAMPLE: The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) is our nation’s source of dedicated federal funding for libraries across the country, including [My Home Library]. Last year our state received [nearly \$2 million] in LSTA funding, which provided materials for [summer reading programs, online databases, bookmobiles that serve our remote rural areas and more]. Thanks to LSTA funding, [My Home Library] [loaned our 20 hotspots to more than 150 students and 10 nonprofit organizations].

3. Close with a call to action or offer a solution to the problem.

EXAMPLE: [My Home Library], like libraries across the country, fills vital needs in our community, from technology training to employment assistance to early literacy programs. This is the third time the White House budget proposal eliminates nearly all federal funding for libraries. I urge my Senators and my Representative to support full funding for LSTA and the Innovative Approaches to Literacy program in their respective spending bills. [My Representative], who serves on the House Appropriations Committee, is especially well-positioned to advocate for libraries. To cut funding for libraries means to undercut opportunities libraries offer everyone in [My Town].

Amplify the message when your letter gets published.

- **Spread the news as broadly as possible!** You can multiply the impact of your letter by sharing it on social media. Tweet it directly at your representative and senators, thanking them or urging them to support libraries. Social media addresses for your decision-makers is on the ALA's website: ala.org/fundlibraries
- **Ask your friends and library supporters** to respond to the letter by commenting online. If you want to see more coverage of libraries and the services they provide to your community, show the news outlet that their readers care. The more news content elicits a response from readers, the higher priority the issue takes for news editors, who decide what news to cover.
- **If you don't use social media,** email your letter directly to your elected leaders along with a note that reinforces your message, encouraging your leaders' continued support for libraries or urging them to make libraries a priority in federal spending decisions.